

Resource Families
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I. OVERVIEW

The Resource Family Workgroup was charged with making recommendations for the processes and method by which the Child Welfare System in the State of New Jersey will recruit, select, train, support and retain resource parents. The recommendations needed to be measurable, consistent with the mission, vision and core beliefs of the Child Welfare System and the principles laid out in the settlement of the Charlie H. lawsuit.

In developing the recommendations the workgroup had to identify the most critical resources needed and the key action steps that should be taken to implement the proposed model for recruitment, training, and retention.

The workgroup devoted a great deal of time addressing the area of retention. The members felt that given the media attention to several troubling cases in New Jersey, that maintaining resource parents in the system was extremely critical. The group felt that the best means of recruitment were resource parents themselves. Therefore, retention is imperative.

Although, it was decided that board rates need to be equalized in order to achieve a standard board rate structure, the group felt that the availability of support services to resource parents was significant to retaining resources families in the system. The workgroup recommended a continuum of community-based support services be made available for resource families from licensure through post-adoption for all families regardless of agency affiliation. The resource workgroup specifically identified the need to provide resource families with respite and babysitting services on a regular basis as well as on an emergency basis.

The group also recommended the creation of a Resource Family Support Worker position in DYFS. The Resource Family Support Worker would serve as the point person for the resource families, coordinating services and support for the resource families.

There was agreement among the members of the group that resource families did not feel integral to the child welfare process. It was felt that resource parents should be a full equal partner in the decision making process and thus should be allowed to voice their opinions by being invited to the table. The Resource Family Support Worker was another vehicle the resource families could use to ensure their voices were heard. The Resource Family Support Worker would notify the families of the forums that would be available for them to express their concerns to ensure that they have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process.

Recruitment was another area addressed by the workgroup. The group felt that recruitment should be anchored in the community, using various community groups to help locate resource families. The use of a public relations firm should be obtained to help the local community develop appropriate recruitment messages.

The major recruitment initiative recommended by the group was the development of recruitment consortia. The group felt the consortia should be community based and ultimately responsible for the recruitment done within the communities. The workgroup also felt that continued use of various types of recruitment materials should be available to the public and given to the specific population being targeted.

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The workgroup also agreed that faith based organizations should continue to be used in the state's recruitment efforts. The state should work to specifically target the faith based organizations of current resource families, DYFS staff and contract providers.

Throughout the seven (7) week period, the workgroup reviewed the role of the resource families. They felt that the use of relatives as caregivers was paramount to addressing the current deficits in available placements for children who required out of home placements. Where appropriate, relatives should be considered first whenever a child requires out of home placement.

The workgroup felt that relative caregivers should receive the same board payments and services that regular foster parents receive. The relative, if already approved as a caregiver, who wishes to now become a licensed foster or adoptive parents for the child should not have to meet higher standard in order for that to occur. The workgroup also felt that some specific recruitment efforts should be geared to the relatives and that a broader definition of relative should be used, thereby making family friends and neighbors a part of the relative care provider category.

The workgroup decided that the home study process was too cumbersome and involved too many players. Re-organization and consolidation are two words that were continually used by the workgroup when discussing the reformation of the home study process. A key component of the group's discussion was to develop systems that would ensure applicants could track their status during the process and receive regular one-on-one communication from a staff person.

There should also be a timeframe for completing the home study. This timeframe would include a timeline for completing each step in the process. The resource parents would be advised of these timelines and could also assist in monitoring the progress of the staff responsible for completing the home study.

The workgroup also felt that the "waiver process" for families with criminal or DYFS history requires more consistency in the decision making. It is recommended that the waiver decision should be made by a fixed team of managers in the DYFS Central Office and the Office of Licensing.

Training was seen as a critical area in terms of recruiting, supporting and retaining resource families. The workgroup decided the current Pre-service PATH training should be replaced with a new curriculum custom-designed for New Jersey to address key competencies.

The group also believed that a Training "hub" provider should be created and this "hub" would take the lead responsibility in determining pre-service and in service training needs and developing a community based delivery system for the training.

Although, the workgroup did not specifically determine the number of resource families needing to be recruited and retained annually in order to ensure a sufficient number of resource families for New Jersey's children requiring out of home placements, they did recognize the fact that 229 foster home providers had their license revoked last year and that approximately 500 providers voluntarily close their homes to the state's children each year.

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With these figures in mind, the workgroup realized that in order to develop a Resource Family System that would be effective in any community of this state, it had to encompass:

1. Making resource families a real partner in the child welfare process
2. Timelines for the completion of the home study process
3. Ensure all resource families, regardless of agency affiliation are governed by the same standards and receive equal compensation, and
4. Provide good and easily accessible support service to all resource parents.

II. BACKGROUND

Key Strengths of the existing system:

1. Resource families currently provide permanency for many children in foster care. Over 80% of the children adopted through DYFS are adopted by their foster parents.
2. DYFS has some contracts with community based organizations, including faith based entities, to recruit and support resource families.
3. The relative care programs that became effective in January 2002 are a good start to developing a comprehensive program utilizing relative caregivers.
4. The current DYFS board rate system is tied to the care provided by the resource parents.

Key Weaknesses of the current system that must be addressed:

1. The system is fragmented and disjointed.
2. There is no data to monitor trends or provide information that can be used for quality improvement.
3. There is a lack of trust among all players – Resource parents of DYFS; Birth Families of Resource Families and vice versa; youth and DYFS, etc.
4. Caseloads are too large to allow for caseworkers to develop and maintain supportive relationships with youth, birth parents and resource families.

Key barriers that must be overcome in order to address the problems successfully:

1. The negative perception and publicity about DYFS and Resource Families has to be overcome and altered.
2. The lack of a working relationship, on behalf of the child, by the resource family with the birth family needs to be overcome. There are trust and safety issues to be addressed.
3. The resource family system is complex and needs to be reworked into a cohesive system that recruits, retains and supports resource families as key players in achieving positive outcomes for children.
4. The service model of the Division needs to link children, birth families and resource families as opposed to working with them as three distinct entities.

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III. RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES OF ALL THE RECOMMENDATIONS THE WORK GROUP HAS COME UP WITH, WHICH 3-4 DOES THE GROUP VIEW AS THE MOST IMPORTANT, AND WHY?

Priority	Why is it most Important	Links to core/values/mission/vision/settlement agreement guiding principle
Resource Families should be part of all team decision making conferences.	Ensures everyone with knowledge & interest in the child is a part of the process and that the best decisions will be made about the child's needs and care.	Families are respected as equal partners in decision-making. In making determinations about plans and services, the child's interests are paramount.
Develop a work plan for DYFS and its contract providers to complete the home study which will include setting timelines for completing each step in the process to ensure movement in a timely, efficient manner.	Ensure resource families know where they are in the process, can assist in bringing homes to licensure quicker and ensures a continuous flow of new homes in the system.	Children in out-of-home placement should have stable placements that meet their needs and should be protected from harm caused by multiple placement moves.
Resource families, regardless of agency affiliation are governed by the same standards and receive equal compensation.	Ensures that resource families are supported in the same manner so they do not feel the need to change agency affiliation.	The child welfare system is responsive, accountable, and focused upon continuous quality improvement and equality.
Have "Resource Family Support Workers" as primary contacts and service brokers to the resource families.	Ensures resource families are included in decision-making, are supported and assisted in maintaining the foster child and their families as well.	Families and communities are supported to help every child reach his or her full potential as an adult.

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**IV. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN PRIORITY ORDER FOR EACH
ISSUES ADDRESSED:**

Please note:

The Resource Family Workgroup's Findings and Recommendations are not organized in priority order, but instead grouped according to topic area for ease of reading. All recommendations fall into one of four categories:

F: The Front End

This encompassed recommendations related to anything that happens with resource families prior to the point of a first placement.

R: Retention

This encompassed the support resource families receive from their first placement onward.

T: Training

This encompassed any training related needs—primarily for the resource families themselves, but also for those stakeholders who come in contact with resource parents.

P: Partnership

This encompassed the partnership between the resource families and those they work with (DYFS, birth families, etc.).

F1: Issue

Recruitment efforts leave a shortage of families who are prepared to care for New Jersey's children requiring out of home care.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ The public perceptions of DYFS, children in care, and resource parents are not positive.
- ◆ Messages are not tailored or delivered to targeted communities.
- ◆ Efforts are divorced from data—they are not targeted, cost-effective.
- ◆ Potential applicants are asked to pick foster care or adoption as their preference instead of trying to maximize their potential to serve children in need

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Anchor recruitment in the community, using community groups to help locate resource families, allowing children requiring out-of-home placement to remain in their neighborhoods.
- ◆ Recruit resource families as general resources as opposed to asking families to commit to either foster care or adoption.
- ◆ Recruitment efforts should be directed at relative and family friends to maximize the potentials to increase the resource family pool.

F1: Recommendation 1

Form community-based recruitment consortia including DYFS and its community partners/contract agencies.

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◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Office of Program Support and Permanency

DYFS Central Office recruiter pulls together all the DYFS recruiters statewide, they go back out to the highest priority communities (where the children come from and where there is a shortage of resource families) and take the lead to pull consortiums together.

◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

Needs to be coordinated with Community Partnership Initiative – however preliminary work with existing contract agencies and DYFS recruiters could occur by 4/1/04

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing:***

Increase the number of recruiters statewide

✓ ***Services:***

Hire a public relations firm that can work closely with each community-based consortium to help determine the appropriate local messages and effective techniques for outreach.

✓ ***Information Technology:***

Have a computer system that can be accessed by community partners. It must generate self-evaluative information about where the children are coming from, their needs/characteristics, about where the resource families are.

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ A consortium means a gathering of the DYFS recruiter staff, all of the contract providers doing recruitment in an area, and a variety of community stakeholders.
- ◆ The following stakeholders are invited to get involved in recruitment consortia:
 - faith-based organizations,
 - child care groups,
 - counseling centers,
 - recreational facilities,
 - after-school programs,
 - local schools (school administrators),
 - PTAs,
 - politicians (mayor and freeholders),
 - police,
 - colleges and universities,
 - media,
 - hospitals,
 - health care providers,
 - advocacy organizations,
 - foster youth,
 - scout troupes,
 - senior citizens (AARP),
 - local businesses, and
 - other state agencies (TANF, EIP).
- ◆ Build this community recruitment consortium model into the system developed by community partnership workgroup.
- ◆ Although all parties are still encouraged to develop their own messages, use the recruitment consortia to coordinate working together, making messages consistent and cohesive.
- ◆ The recruitment consortia should be guided by the following principles:
 - children should be placed in their home community whenever possible
 - relative placements are preferred

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- siblings should be kept together
 - minimize the number of placements a child has – work towards a “one child, one home” goal
 - whenever possible, children should be kept in their same school
 - ◆ Target families for recruitment (and prioritize creation of consortia) in the communities where the number of children entering care is greater than the number of appropriate resource families for those children.
 - ◆ Hire a public relations firm that can work closely with each community-based consortium to help determine the appropriate local messages and effective techniques for outreach.
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F1: Recommendation 2

Recruitment initiatives, including consortium efforts, should involve the faith based community as a key recruitment partner.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
DYFS Recruitment, Contract Staff and Recruitment Consortia
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
Initial efforts can begin with community based recruitment efforts beginning 4/1/04 and will be enhanced with the establishment of the consortia 1/1/05

Major Strategies:

- ◆ Within the community-based recruitment efforts, utilize faith communities as recruitment partner who can:
 - Host presenters with a recruitment message
 - Spread recruitment message and materials (fans, notices in newsletters/bulletins)
 - Offer informal support to prospective resource families beyond recruitment
 - ◆ Invite faith communities (along with other community-based organizations) to consider bidding as contract providers with DYFS, to enter into performance-based contracts to recruit a specific number of families for children.
 - ◆ Offer small “grants” to faith communities to cover the expense of recruitment campaigns.
 - ◆ Target the faith communities of current resource families, DYFS staff, and contract agency staff for involvement, as well as those who have already expressed interest, as recruitment partners.
 - ◆ After assessing what children need placements and areas/communities of the greatest need, specifically seek out partnerships with faith-communities in those areas.
 - ◆ Designate a DYFS recruiter or community-based agency recruiter in each area to work with the local faith communities on recruitment.
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F1: Recommendation 3

Make everyone in the agency about the business of recruiting, using the slogan “Recruitment and Retention are Everyone’s Job”.

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◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Office of Human Resources

◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

4/1/04

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Information Technology:***

Utilize the DYFS intra-net to spread this message

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Train staff on how their every day actions impact the agency's recruitment efforts. Connect them to the larger picture that recruitment is the business of everyone in the agency.
- ◆ Maintain staff positions dedicated to the role of recruiting. Recruiters' time is reserved for recruitment (not processing, training, etc.).
- ◆ Ensure recruitment materials are made available to staff, who can distribute while conducting their daily field activities.
- ◆ Develop a speaker bureau of DYFS staff and contract providers and train them in presenting the recruitment message to the community.

F1: Recommendation 4

Recruitment and licensing need to reflect a single process that allows applicants to be licensed as "Resource Families" that can be utilized as foster or adoptive placements depending on the needs of the child and the strengths of the family.

◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Office of Program Support and Permanency in collaboration with the Office of Licensing

◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

1/1/05

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing***

Staff need to be trained on this model

✓ ***Information Technology***

- Data systems, including PCIS, will need to be adapted to reflect this new designation
- DYFS reporting formats will need to be changed to reflect new designation – and done in a way that allows comparison to previous years so improvement can be evaluated through data/statistics

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Major Strategies

- ◆ Initiate a recruitment campaign to find “resource families”—without requiring them to select between foster care and adoption
- ◆ Develop a new “resource family” recruitment slogan and accompanying materials that reflect the vision, mission, and core beliefs of the child welfare system for use in statewide recruitment as well as for use by interested community partners.
- ◆ Have a single 800 toll-free phone number and website for Resource Family Recruitment.

F1: Recommendation 5

Develop and maintain a media campaign to dispel myths about resource families and increase positive public sentiments about resource families (countering recent negative coverage).

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Public Affairs (DHS)
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
Immediate implementation and development of an annual promotional campaign
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing***
Staff person to handle positive media campaign as a routine responsibility

Major Strategies

- ◆ A PR person at DYFS regularly pitches positive stories about resource families to the media.
 - ◆ The “Resource Family Advisory Council” (to be discussed below) identify themselves/ask friends to find resource families and youth willing to be featured in media features.
 - ◆ In future months, DHS and DYFS leaders take deliberate opportunities to thank resource families and staff in meetings and in public/media.
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F1: Recommendation 6

Involve resource families in recruitment.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Recruiters and community recruitment consortium
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
4/1/04
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services:***
 - Funding for supports for resource parents (stipend, transportation, child care, etc.)
 - Materials for Resource Families and DYFS Staff (and consortia) to use in recruitment

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Major Strategies

- ◆ Develop and support resource families as they:
 - Recruit their friends/in their communities.
 - Make public presentations about their experiences, developing a speaker's bureau to do this.
 - Mentor prospective resource families.
 - Speak at orientation.
- ◆ Organize and coordinate resource families' involvement in recruitment at the local/community level, maintaining a pool of local resource parents who are willing to play particular roles.
- ◆ Pay a stipend to resource families when they make public presentations or speak at orientation. Also provide (or cover expenses for) child care and transportation to enable resource families to play this role.
- ◆ Issue a broad invitation to resource parents, asking them to come forward if they are willing to play any or all of these roles.
- ◆ Resource families should serve as "ambassadors" spreading recruitment messages at scheduled community events.
- ◆ DYFS, via contracts with community agencies, should develop staff positions (paid part or full time jobs) to be held by resource parents, sending those resource parents out into local communities to do recruitment.

F1: Recommendation 7

Maximize the use of relative caregivers, and promote their becoming resources to the children as a means to ensure family connections for children. Relative caregivers should be considered equal in the "resource parent spectrum" and receive services and board payments as such.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Office of Policy, Planning and Support and Budget Office
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:*** 9/1/04
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services***
 - Funding for equalized board payments
 - Funding for additional support services

Major Strategies

- ◆ Develop and spread a clear message that relatives are the first priority placement when children require out of home care. Policy and practice models should:
 - Mandate relative searches

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- Allow for the caution that safety and best interests of the child must be considered first and remain paramount
 - Use a broad definition of relatives, including family friends and neighbors
 - Be complemented by Quality Improvement measures that monitor the use and supports given to relative caregivers to insure a consistent program statewide

 - ◆ Require a family group conference for every child entering into or who, due to an emergent removal, is already in placement.
 - ◆ Develop agency expertise in locating all relatives of children through a parent locator program (staff members well-trained in web-technology to find people). They help with relative searches when children come through the front door, as well as children currently in the system.
 - ◆ Bring in relatives already providing care to help staff recruit.
 - ◆ Train DYFS to understand how to interview, identify relatives, family friends, etc. For example, require staff to utilize genograms with families to focus on who is in the child's family.
 - ◆ Develop multi-media materials on relative caregiver program to share with potential relative caregivers at the front end. Materials should be available in Spanish and other languages as appropriate. They should be "reader friendly".
 - ◆ When appropriate, children should be included in identifying and determining if relative placement is the placement of choice. Consideration may need to be given to a child's attachment to others in the community, etc.
 - ◆ Make study process and standards consistent so that if a kinship care provider is already approved, they are also fully qualified as kinship legal guardians. If the kinship provider wishes to become licensed foster or adoptive parents, the initial standards and study should be integral to the requirements. Work to minimize or eliminate additional steps for relatives making the transition from one status to another
 - ◆ Develop clear guidelines for the administration of kinship care "emergency funds"—set standards and streamline bureaucratic practices so that when kin families are in need of financial supports (for example, furniture, clothing costs, or home repairs when children first move in). They can have timely access with consistency across the state.
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F1: Recommendation 8

Ensure that families are only rejected for fair, documented reasons.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Office of Policy, Planning and Support and Office of Licensing

- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
6/1/04

- ◆ ***Resources needed:***

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✓ **Information Technology**

Incorporate into data systems the ability to track families rejected and associated “demographic” information, including reasons for rejection to allow for tracking of trends.

Major Strategies

- ◆ Document the reason why any family is rejected.
 - ◆ Never reject a family without supervisory approval.
 - ◆ Give all applicants a manual of accurate licensing standards and a list of frequently asked questions so they know what is and is not required; discuss physical inspection of the home, collateral contacts, private conversations with all children in the home, etc.
 - ◆ Ensure that standards being enforced are the same across all counties and consistent with all contract providers.
 - ◆ Share with families any violations of standards found in their home—immediately.
 - ◆ Train workers to be aware of personal values, especially socioeconomic and culturally sensitive.
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F2: Issue

The Foster Home Study Process is too cumbersome.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ The process is fragmented, disjointed and involves multiple players which is confusing to applicants.
- ◆ There are no time frames for completion of a homestudy.
- ◆ Applicants are not aware of their status in the process.

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Reorganize and consolidate the steps in the homestudy process.
 - ◆ Add time frames for completion of homestudies and monitor via a tracking system.
 - ◆ Ensure applicants are aware of their status throughout the process and receive one-on-one communication from a staff person on a regular basis/at each step in the process.
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F2: Recommendation 1

Inquiries are handled by a centralized inquiry line staff. All information about callers is immediately referred electronically to the appropriate local staff. Then, a team of three people (either within DYFS or at a contracted private agency) work together at the local level (geographically assigned) to bring a resource family through the process.

◆ **Lead Responsibility:**

Program Operations with support from the Office of Program Support and Permanency

◆ **Target Date to complete:**

9/1/04

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◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing***

Adequate staffing, including “para-professional” positions; training for staff on new system

✓ ***Services***

Ongoing training, technical support and expert consultation as the system is introduced and implemented

✓ ***Information Technology***

Data systems must be developed and/or modified to track and support the new system, with benchmarks for performance built in

Major Strategies

◆ Two Homebuilder/Trainers work together as a team in the following manner:

- One has special skill for delivering training
- One has special skill developing homestudies
- Visit the prospective families’ homes for the first time prior to training to orient and begin collecting homestudy/application information
- Deliver orientation
- Deliver training
- Complete home study visits
- Go with Office of Licensing to home to check standards
- “Shepherd” families through the process
- Guide all the families in one training group through the whole process
- Works with the training group to help them serve as a support to one another
- Makes a “warm hand off” of the licensed family to the Resource Family Support Worker
- *Note: Offices have multiple teams of this sort, staggering the start dates of their training sessions and mostly completing one “class” through to licensure before starting the next. The appropriate caseload size and time to process one “class” requires further analysis.*

◆ One paraprofessional staff person:

- Easily accessible by phone
- Handles inquiry calls/follows up with inquiries
- Calls those in the local area who inquired to enroll them in training
- Communicates with resource families about where they are at in the process
- Provides assistance (via phone) as they complete their application materials
- Contacts and follows up with references
- Schedules fingerprinting (if not completed at a training session)

F2: Recommendation 2

Develop a checklist with a timeline so families know all of the steps they must complete, then keep them apprised of their progress.

◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Office of Program Support and Permanency

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◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

6/1/04

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing***

Additional staff to carry out this added responsibility

✓ ***Services***

Funding for various materials (post cards, etc)

✓ ***Information Technology***

Technical assistance in developing website services and tools

Major Strategies:

- ◆ Provide for one-to-one contact (via phone, email, post card) between applicant and agency worker
 - ◆ Invest in passive ways for families to monitor their own progress (website, call-in progress line, mailed “receipts”)
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F2: Recommendation 3

Diminish the time criminal and child abuse history clearance takes.

◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Program Operations in collaboration with the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Office of Licensing

◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

9/1/04

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Services***

New fingerprint system that allows for accurate fingerprints to be taken on –site at pre-service training on a regular basis

Major Strategies

- ◆ Take fingerprints at the first training session. Bring in needed people and equipment to rapidly complete the task.
- ◆ Make the process of “waivers” for families with criminal or DYFS history consistent by having all decisions made by a set team of managers in the Central Office, including a representative from the Office of Licensing. Have the entire team share responsibility for making this decision.
- ◆ Have the “Waivers” team meet at a set time every other week. Let the staff know that they can submit waiver questions to the team on those meeting dates to assure timely review and decision.

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F2: Recommendation 4

Facilitate completion of the application to become a resource parent and implement a practice model that has the homestudy and training process simultaneously.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Office of Program Support and Permanency
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
9/1/04
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing –***
 - Paraprofessional staff person assigned to each homefinding team to provide over-the-phone assistance to the applicant
 - Staff person for info technology requirements
 - ✓ ***Information Technology***
Development and maintenance of on-line materials and information

Major Strategies

- ◆ Application, information and forms used in the homestudy and documents used in training are available online.
- ◆ Create a step-by-step cover sheet to help with every question or form.
- ◆ Send someone to the family's home for "human" assistance in completing the application, if the family desires.
- ◆ Have the paraprofessional phone staff available during this step to offer assistance
- ◆ Simplify what is in the application.
- ◆ Have the homestudy begin during the first visit, which takes place before training even begins.

F2: Recommendation 5

Develop a workplan for DYFS and its contract providers. Set a timeline for completion of each step in the process to keep the process as a whole moving in a timely, efficient manner

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Office of Program Support and Permanency and the Administrator of Contract Operations
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
9/1/04
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services –***

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Consultant to work with DYFS, Contract Agencies and the Resource Family Advisory Board to develop the timelines, data sets and web supports

- ✓ ***Information Technology*** –
Data and web system to support the process

Major Strategies:

- ◆ Review the time taken for each of the steps in the approval process by DYFS and each of its contract providers. Use “best possible” times to set standards that then apply to all who help families through the process.
- ◆ Hold DYFS staff and contract providers accountable to the time standards set for individual steps in the process and to the overall timeline for approving families.
- ◆ Develop an online tracking process, completed by the DYFS staff and/or the contract providers involved. Allow families to check online or via phone for up-to-date information on the steps completed and remaining. Also use this system to track the performance of DYFS and contract providers to hold them accountable for timely completion.

F3: Issue

Families are not supported along the way.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ Families feel they are navigating the system alone
- ◆ There is no one to facilitate assistance to families going through the process whose homes may have minor licensing infractions that do not compromise the safety or well being of a child
- ◆ New resource families may or may not have any connection to experienced resource families

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Add community-based organizations to the pool of potential resource family supports
- ◆ Utilize experience resource families as mentors.

F3: Recommendation 1

The community helps families prepare and continue to be resource parents in many ways. Mentors are also utilized to support resource families.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Office of Program Support and Permanency issues RFP for community-based agency to assume the role of providing mentor services. This could be linked to community recruitment consortia who would also be helping to mobilize community supports, in general, to resource families.
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
1/1/05
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services*** –

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Funding for contract

✓ ***Information Technology –***

Data system that links mentor contract agency to DYFS to facilitate referrals and reporting

Major Strategies:

- ◆ The community consortia promote the use of community to assist resource families, for example, by trade unions doing home repairs, young adults in higher education settings are mentors or provide tutoring or respite services; day care and summer camps hold slots, community businesses offer youth internships
- ◆ Mentors are trained to support prospective resource families and paid a stipend for the time and effort they devote to the role.
- ◆ Mentors who are paid a stipend are expected to play the following roles:
 - Guiding and retaining prospective parents starting from the inquiry, through home study process and up to the placement.
 - Helping with system/parenting questions following placement.
 - Inviting the prospective resource parent into their home to “shadow”
 - Serving as an advocate/liaison if the family encounters difficulty navigating the system
 - Accompany the resource parent on “firsts” including: placement, court date, etc.
 - Introduce the resource parent to the local resource families association (be a buddy)
- ◆ The stipend should cover transportation, child care and a reasonable reimbursement level for their time and efforts.
- ◆ Mentors will be expected to follow set standards and attend periodic training and supervision sessions
- ◆ *Note: The presence of a paid mentoring program is not meant to diminish or replace the many informal, supportive, mentoring relationships that are developed between resource families (particularly through the resource parent associations). The presence of a mentor is not designed to replace the retention efforts of homefinders, trainers, etc. For example, a mentor may assist with application materials, however, this should be primarily the responsibility of the agency. Mentors should play a role helping prospective parents find needed assistance.*
- ◆ Unless they choose to opt out, all prospective resource families should be matched with an experienced resource family mentor following their initial inquiry.

R1: Issue

Board rates are not consistent among DYFS resource families and contract agency resource families. Support services are not readily available, nor consistent statewide, nor consistent public/private.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ While some support services are available, knowledge of them and access to them is ad hoc
- ◆ Funding of support services are based on dollar amount and not child’s needs

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- ◆ Services are based on resource parents willingness to utilize the services as opposed to an assessment of need
- ◆ Board rates are inconsistent between public and private agencies

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Support services need to be available consistently statewide
 - ◆ Support services need to be provided based on an assessment and delivered timely
 - ◆ Equalize the availability of support services to all resource parents, regardless of agency affiliation
 - ◆ Equalize board rates to achieve a standardized board rate structure
-

R1: Recommendation 1

There needs to be continuum of community-based support services for resource families, from placement through post-adoption, for all families regardless of agency affiliation

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Regional Business Office
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
9/1/04
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing –***
Staff position needed to maintain the data base
 - ✓ ***Information Technology –***
Requires a workable, user-friendly contract data base that is descriptive and readily accessed throughout the child welfare system as well as through the resource family website. It also needs to be translated into hard copy. And, it needs to be updated on a semi-annual basis.

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Utilize the community based consortia to ensure the existence of these support services as part of their service delivery system.
 - ◆ A directory of support services for resources families will be developed and available both in hard copy and on the resource family website
 - ◆ Contracts with provider agencies should include a provision that requires outreach and education to resources. This should be utilized in assessing the effectiveness of the agency's services.
 - ◆ Special attention should be given so that support services are oriented towards providing for sibling placement together whenever possible. When placements together are not possible, support services should be available that facilitate all siblings being placed in the same community and maintaining frequent visitation and contact.
-

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R1: Recommendation 2

Make respite care and babysitting services readily available to all resource parents.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility***
Office of Policy, Planning and Support; Fiscal; and Regional Business Operations
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete***
9/1/04
- ◆ ***Resources needed***
 - ✓ ***Services –***
Funding for respite and babysitting services

Major Strategies

- ◆ Provide funding for, or actual services, that provide sufficient emergency and planned respite services to meet resource families' needs, making it readily available and easy to access.
- ◆ Appropriate respite plans shall be developed as part of team conferencing and responsibility for ensuring that services are obtained rests with the Resources Family Support worker.
- ◆ Determine reasonable, market-based babysitting rates and adjust our rate schedule accordingly.
- ◆ Standards need to be developed to guide resource parents as to when and how they can utilize alternate short term care – as leaving child with a neighbor when making a shopping trip, or an overnight stay

R1: Recommendation 3

Resource families, regardless of agency affiliation are governed by the same standards and receive equal compensation

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility :***
Fiscal and Regional Business Operations
- ◆ ***Target Date to Implement:***
1/1/05
- ◆ ***Resources Needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services –***
Consultant services to help in determining rate structure
 - ✓ ***Information Technology –***
Computer system that supports a unified rate structure

Major Strategies

- ◆ Board rates should be standardized and reflect the level of care required by the child and provided by the resource parent. The Hornsby Zeller reports on Contracted Foster Care and the DYFS Board Rate system should guide these efforts.

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- ◆ Development and review of the proposed standardized rate structure should occur with broad stakeholder representation.

R2: Issue

The current organizational structure and staffing patterns do not support relationship development.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ Resource families do not have a worker assigned to their home.
- ◆ Resource families feel they are working with many system members without clarity about roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ Staff feel they do not know foster parents.
- ◆ Resource families do not feel integral to the process.

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Provide support workers to resource families.
- ◆ Build relationships between Resource Families and DYFS Staff through community- based agency structure and staff assignment.
- ◆ Involve Resource Parents in Placement Decisions.

R2: Recommendation 1

Have “Resource Family Support Workers” as primary contacts and service brokers.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Office of Human Resources and Operations
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
1/1/05
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing***
 - Additional staff is needed to fulfill the roles outlined below
 - Training in the new resource family model is needed for staff and external system members
 - ✓ ***Information Technology –***
Web based system that serves as a real-time, user friendly resource directory that is available to staff, resource parents and community agencies

Major Strategies

- ◆ Establish Resource Family Support Workers who have the following characteristics and job responsibilities:
 - Has the same educational/training qualifications as children’s caseworkers.
 - Has gone through pre-service training with resource families.
 - Works within the resource family’s geographic area or community.

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- Carries load of not more than 15 families.
 - Works closely with that same area's "Resource Specialist"—someone who provides and keeps track of area services and maintains connections with them.
 - Is a part of the "team" meetings along with the resource family and the caseworker.
 - Works in teams with other Resource Family Support Workers so that everyone has a backup.
 - Serve as the one point person for the family, coordinating contacts with the many other workers and professionals that they must know and work with.
 - Visit the resource family's home every month, spending a minimum of 3-4 hours. Stay closely linked to the person or agency that recruited the family, participating in a warm-handoff, receiving the family at completion of licensing.
 - Talk regularly with the caseworkers of the children in the home and the caseworker's supervisor, coordinating support inside the home.
 - Provide a "phone book" of all the names, numbers, and roles of people who will work with the resource family and the children in their home.
 - Broker services, including respite care, by knowing family's needs, planning for services, and advocating on behalf of the family to get those services.
 - Be aware of and a linkage to local service providers, especially those who take Medicaid.
 - At least once, visit the homes of all the families who he/she "backs-up" for colleagues and brings his/her "back-up" to all families on own caseload.
 - Know about any issues that the family may be having.
 - Help create quality placements—so that no additional children join a family without consulting him/her.
 - Provide the resource families and DYFS with continuity, consistency, and uniformity in the support and monitoring of resource families.
 - Play a monitoring role through relationship, not through an "I got you" approach
- ◆ The Resource Family Support Worker should make use of available loss and separation services.
 - ◆ Work with OIS to have a letter sent automatically to families after children leave their home, encouraging them to maintain contact.
-

R2: Recommendation 2

Resource families are equipped to make good decisions about what children will be placed in their homes and their role in relation to that child.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Human Resources; Office of Policy, Planning and Support and local foster care units
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
/1/05
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services –***
Funding for placement kits

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✓ ***Information Technology –***

Web based communication system to facilitate the sharing of information between the child's worker, the resource parent, the resource family support worker and the placement facilitator

Major Strategies:

- ◆ The child's caseworker and the Resource Family Support worker will be included in all placement decisions to ensure that someone who knows the child and someone who knows the family speak s directly to one another prior to placement.
- ◆ Information will be shared when the child is brought to the resource parent's home via the use of the Placement Kit. Complete information from assessments of children (including realistic information about children's needs) will be shared with resource parents prior to the decision to place a child in a resource parent's home to ensure good matching.
- ◆ Resource families are allowed and encouraged to have continuing relationships with children who previously lived in their home. They are given time and information to help children transition out of their home.

R3: Issue

Peer support is an untapped resource.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ Local Foster Parents Associations are not fully utilized for support of resource families
- ◆ Local Foster Parents Associations function at different levels and are in transition

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Establish or strengthen “peer support groups” of resource parents at the local level

R3: Recommendation 1

Follow the Family Support Organization model to reframe foster parent associations into stronger support systems for all resource families.

◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Office of Program Support and Permanency with TA from the Partnership for Children

◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

1/1/05

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing –***

Staff position to spearhead this initiative

✓ ***Services –***

Funding for contracts to support these organizations statewide

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Major Strategies:

- ◆ Develop a collaborative work group, including the “resources family advisory council” and technical assistance from Casey, to implement this model at the local level on a statewide basis.
- ◆ These community based groups should be encouraged and supported to provide the following services:
 - Support groups for resource families and children/youth,
 - Social and recreational events for resource families and children/youth,
 - Coordination of mentoring to resource families,
 - Development of educational newsletters & materials,
 - Delivery of some ongoing training opportunities for resource families, such as time and stress management or navigating public systems.
 - Coordination of a local speaker’s bureau of resource parents and youth willing to share their experiences publicly.
 - Advocacy for and referral to other support services (for example, although they will not be responsible for directly providing respite and babysitting services—except during their own meetings—they will advocate for these and other services on behalf of the members of their association).
- ◆ Lend resource family associations the support of DYFS as they work to make programs available to their members; however, ensure that resource family associations can retain independence from DYFS to also play an advocacy role.
- ◆ Provide the necessary level of staffing to help ensure the efforts are successful. This will include funding for:
 - A DYFS contract manager over the statewide contract.
 - Paid, full-time (or nearly full-time) resource parent(s)
 - Several resource families across the state paid a few hours a week
 - Additional support for a group of resource family volunteers
- ◆ Contracts for these services should be performance based, asking the contract provider to work towards availability and consistency of Resource Family Associations/FSOs statewide.
- ◆ Have a DYFS liaison available on the local level to assist with support and communication. However, keep the role of the DYFS liaison to that of assistance, not primary coordination.

R4: Issue

Quality Assurance and Improvement of Retention and Support

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ There is little to no data that reflects the retention and support of resource parents

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Data and actions will be taken that allow for monitoring of the retention and support rates of resource parents

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R4: Recommendation 1

Use data to monitor the exit rates and reasons for resource parents leaving the system so as to guide steps that need to be taken to retain resource families

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Program Operations and Data Unit
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
1/1/05
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services –***
consultant services to design the quality assurance benchmarks and tools
 - ✓ ***Information Technology –***
staff time to make required software programs available

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Create satisfaction surveys of prospective resource families who did not pursue licensure and resource families who closed their homes. Mail them to all families at the point when they stop being involved and follow up by phone with a representative sample.
- ◆ Conduct an annual survey of all current resource families to determine the impact of changes made and ask them to offer improvement recommendations. Follow up with a representative sample by phone.
- ◆ Contract agencies providing support to resource families will provide data to the division that reflects the degree to which their services were perceived by resource families as supportive and contributed to positive retention rates.

P1 Issue:

Resource families do not have the trust, resources, and support to partner with birth families.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ Resource families' personal values get mixed into their perceptions of birth families.
- ◆ Resource families feel information is kept from them.
- ◆ Birth families do not have the information to understand the role of the resource family, sometimes making them reluctant to accept the resource parents help.
- ◆ Caseworkers are not familiar with models that enhance relationships between birth and resource families

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Children require a broad spectrum of support—from resource families and biological families.
 - ◆ A model of partnership between resource families and birth families needs to be developed and staff and external stakeholders need to be trained on it
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Resource Families
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P1: Recommendation 1

Resource parents are trained to help them develop relationships with birthparents.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
DYFS Training Office; Office of Program Support and Permanency; Consultation from the Casey Foundation
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
4/1/04
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing*** –
additional training staff
 - ✓ ***Services*** –
technical assistance and consultation services from Casey

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Train resource families and staff on specific techniques for engaging birthparents.
- ◆ Introduce resource families to other successful resource parents who have worked with birth parents.
- ◆ Have youth speak about the importance of birthparents in their lives.
- ◆ Provide resource families and staff with training and materials that document the range of concrete ways a partnership between a birth family and a resource family can be established.
- ◆ Success stories are utilized to demonstrate hope for families being reunited. Data about the rate of reunification supplements these stories.
- ◆ A birth family panel is included in the training and to support and reinforce partnership during the training of resource parents.

P1: Recommendation 2

Through team planning, resource families are consulted and involved in determining the degree of contact between them and the birth family.

- ◆ ***Lead responsibility:***
Office of Policy, Planning and Support
- ◆ ***Target date***
Coordinate with Case Practice Committee recommendations on Team Conferencing
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing*** –
Additional staff to support the use of team planning as a regular case practice function

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- ✓ ***Services*** –
training on team conferencing and planning

Strategies:

- ◆ Discuss specific safety standards as a team prior to letting birth families know the whereabouts of the resource family and child.
- ◆ Provide training for caseworkers to assist them in assessing and facilitating appropriate degrees of birth parent and resource parent interaction.
- ◆ Help resource partners access other support for this new role, as needed (potentially mentoring, therapist consult, etc.)

P2: Issue

Resource families do not feel that they have input into policies and practices.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ When policy and practice initiatives involve the input of families, they are passed through Foster, Adoptive Family Services.
- ◆ Local Foster Parent Associations review policies informally and give feedback to the Division; however, the review happens in isolation from the Division making the feedback loop ineffective.
- ◆ Periodically, District Offices and Regions have meeting with families but these are not regular or standardized.

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Expand the ability for resource families, youth, and birth parents to become engaged in policy and practice development and implementation.
-

P2: Recommendation 1

Develop a statewide advisory group, “Resource Family Advisory Council,” regarding resource family issues, including a diverse group of members, to help the Division formulate policy and practice.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Office of Program Support and Planning
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
Immediate process to hire a staff coordinator
Public call for nominations made by February 1, 2004
First meeting in the month of April, 2004
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing***
Division staff coordinator in the Office of Program Support and Planning
Time from the Director of the Office of Program Support and Planning and the Director of DYFS

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✓ ***Services***

Babysitting
Transportation
Stipends to participants

✓ ***Information Technology***

Integrated database management system of resource families

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Develop a 20 person advisory council to help DYFS on a state-wide basis with a first meeting in April.
- ◆ The group assists in the development and implementation of new policies and practices related to resource families and the children they serve.
- ◆ This group will meet monthly.
- ◆ Representatives include:
 - Resource families who currently have placements—including foster, adoptive, and kinship families.
 - Resource families who exited/no longer actively take placements.
 - Current and former youth in out of home care.
 - Birth parents whose children are or have been in placement.
- ◆ DYFS will make a public call for nominations to serve on this advisory committee.
- ◆ Nominations for participation on this group will be submitted to the Director's Office by February 1.
- ◆ Selections will be made by a committee including DYFS, FAFS, and members of the Resource Families Workgroup.
- ◆ For the first cycle, half will serve a two-year term. The other half will serve a three-year term. Henceforth, it will create a staggered two-year cycle of rotation of membership.
- ◆ The staff coordinator is responsible for bringing pressing topics to the group and educating them about current DYFS policies and practices.
- ◆ Agenda setting and the feedback loop will be accomplished via monthly meetings with the Advisory Group leadership (governance to be determined by the group), the staff coordinator, the Director of the Office of Program Support and Planning, and the Director of DYFS.

P2: Recommendation 2

Resource families will have regular, meaningful opportunities to raise concerns and voice their opinions to DYFS.

◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Administrator responsible for the office(s)

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◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

April 1, 2004

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ *Staffing*
Minutes

✓ *Services*
Funding for refreshments
Funding for community based meeting space

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Schedule four to six meetings per year (co-hosted by the local resource family association and the district office) to invite all local resource families to meet with their district office manager to voice their concerns and needs.
- ◆ Recognizing that resource families may fear reprisal or fail to see action when raising concerns locally, create regular opportunities (every 3-4 months) to invite all resource families to voice concerns at higher levels to regional and central office administrators.

P3: Issue

Resource Families do not feel they are partners in the case planning process.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ Resource families are sometimes invited and sometimes participate in case plans, child placement review boards meetings, and court hearings.
- ◆ System members, DYFS and the Judiciary included, are vague and ambiguous about the roles and expectations of resources parents

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Institute team decision making/family group conferencing.

P3: Recommendation 1

Resource families should be part of all team decision making conferences.

◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Program Operations

◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
Coordinate with Case Practice workgroup recommendations on team conferencing

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ *Staffing –*
Adequate staffing to support this model

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- ✓ **Services –**
Training on this model

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Include training for the professionals to prepare them to hear and respect the families rather than dominate the discussion.
 - ◆ Provide support—babysitting, transportation, etc.—to facilitate resource family participation.
 - ◆ Replace currently existing meetings, rather than just adding more meetings to the list of resource families’ responsibilities.
 - ◆ Hold team meetings at regular intervals and critical moments, including the point of placement to get resource families fully involved as part of the planned solution rather than just “beds.”
 - ◆ Provide joint training to staff and resource parents on the model of team decision making.
-
-

T1: Issue

Resource families desire more knowledge and skills to support children effectively.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ PATH curriculum is delivered to families as a pre-service requirement.
- ◆ Adoptive families may be a separate group.
- ◆ Relative care providers are not required to attend training unless they become foster parents and presently, the training is not sufficiently appealing to attract a significant number of relative care providers.
- ◆ In-service training is structured around the completion of a set of hours rather than a meaningful distribution of content.

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Content of the training will help prepare resource families for the real situations and needs they can anticipate when children are placed in their homes.
 - ◆ Trainings offered to resource parents should help them develop the necessary skills to successfully support the children in their care.
-
-

T1: Recommendation 1

Replace the current pre-service PATH training with a new training curriculum custom-designed for New Jersey to address key competencies.

- ◆ **Lead Responsibility:**
Training “hub” provider (see discussion below) takes lead responsibility the rest of the process.
- ◆ **Target Date to complete:** 1/1/05
- ◆ **Resources needed:**

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✓ ***Staffing***

A team of DYFS staff and contracted training providers to develop new curriculum.
A number of resource families to serve on the team developing the curriculum.

✓ ***Services***

The services of national experts on child welfare training curriculum development.

Major Strategies (describe specific/concrete activities-actions)

- ◆ Convene a team to develop a new customized training curriculum specifically for New Jersey. The team may be the newly formed “Resource Family Advisory Council” or reconvene the Resource Family Workgroup.
- ◆ This team will build the new training curriculum around the following list of required competencies:

Roles, Responsibilities, and Support: Foster families, adoptive families, and kinship families, and specialized/treatment families will initially be trained together. During the training, families are given plenty of information and support to help them later select the “type” of resource family they are best equipped to be. They are to provide children a sense of “normalcy” and reduce the stigma they experience in care by treating children as full members of everyday family life. They know the services available to help them in their complex role.

Permanency needs: Resource parents are encouraged to accept a flexible caregiver status based on the needs of the child in the home. They discuss the importance of sibling bonds. They discuss their complex roles, both as mentors to birth families and/or as possible permanency resources for the children in their care.

Abuse and Neglect: Understanding the child, the child’s experiences in foster care, and the child’s behaviors—including development of listening and observational skills.

Reunification and birth family connections: They learn the importance of creating roots for the child, keeping the child connected to siblings, working/visiting with relatives of the child, and helping the child feel “grounded.” They learn how to keep family connections alive through visiting, assisting with reunification efforts, and playing a mentoring role with birth parents.

Loss and Separations: Loss and separation—both for the child and the resource parent—are acknowledged and anticipated feelings.

Advocacy: Training must familiarize families with the system that they must navigate, including the judiciary. Resource parents are educated about methods of advocating for the children in their care (attending meetings, utilizing chain of command).

Nuts and Bolts: Include discipline, self-esteem building in children, confidentiality, liability, licensing, applicable legislation, ADHD, etc.

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Teaming: Resource parents receive training on the various points in the life of a child's time in custody when team meetings occur. They are empowered to be full members of the team.

Adjusting the rest of the family: A special, age-appropriate training should be offered for biological children in the home.

- ◆ When a draft version of the new content for pre-service training is developed, share it with other resource parents to further refine content.

T1: Recommendation 2

On an ongoing basis, require families to continue to learn, improve, and update their knowledge via a customized annual in-service training plan, developed around the children's needs and a set of required "competencies."

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Training "hub" provider (see discussion below) takes lead responsibility.
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
1/1/05
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Services***
Funding for delivery of training and the hub

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Develop a list of core competencies for in-service training, using the following suggestions of potential topics:
 - All of the training topics identified above as "core"
 - Discipline
 - Overview of Systems—including child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice
 - Sibling Contact and Bonds
 - Community Recreation and support
 - Medication
 - Licensing
 - Loss & separation
 - Self-esteem building for the child and the parent
 - Child development
 - Diagnoses (beyond ADHD)
 - Education/helping child navigate the system

T2: Issue

Resource parents need a broad range of people trained to understand their new role as full partners.

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Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ Stakeholders currently are not trained together.
- ◆ DYFS does not provide any training to external stakeholders on resource families' roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ A significant number of staff in the judiciary misunderstands the role of resource families.
- ◆ Current messages in staff training do not match the new role intended for resource families.

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ Build mutual understanding of roles between resource families, caseworkers and other key stakeholders

T2: Recommendation 1

Require caseworkers go through the pre-service training of resource families.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Training staff (at DYFS, then pass on to the training hub)
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
July 1, 2004
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing***
Additional staff to accommodate the increase in pre-service training courses
 - ✓ ***Information Technology***
Database to monitor the education and training of staff

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Have the training hub develop a modified plan of the pre-service training which new workers and existing workers will come to.
- ◆ New worker training will incorporate components of pre-service training.
- ◆ Operations will make a new policy regarding the existing employees' responsibility to take the pre-service resource family training.

T2: Recommendation 2

Train external stakeholders to help them understand resource families' role.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Training "hub" provider (see discussion below) takes lead responsibility.
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
July 1, 2004

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♦ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing***

Increase staffing for pre-service training
Staff to hold forums
Resource family co-trainers

✓ ***Services***

Stipends
Babysitting
Transportation
Funding for refreshments

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ♦ Invite external stakeholders to forums where they are introduced to the new resource family system for serving children.
 - ♦ Offer external stakeholders the ability to send staff to resource family pre-service training.
 - ♦ Develop a speaker's bureau of resource parents and send them as guest speakers into trainings currently offered for the judiciary, caseworkers, and providers.
-

T3: Issue

Optimizing learning conditions.

Findings about how things work now:

- ♦ Orientation is separate from pre-service training.
- ♦ Pre-service training occurs mostly in DYFS offices.
- ♦ Limited availability on evenings and weekends.
- ♦ Trainers are agency staff and foster or adoptive parent co-trainer. There may be some guest speakers, but this is inconsistent.

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ♦ Community-based training.
- ♦ Combined orientation and pre-service training to streamline the system.

T3: Recommendation 1

Develop a Training Hub that works to create training in collaboration with community-based partners.

♦ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Office of Policy, Planning, and Support (DYFS training office and DYFS contracting staff)

♦ ***Target Date to complete:***

RFP issued by July 1, 2004
Start up no later than January 1, 2005

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◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing***

DYFS Staff time for proposal development

Later, a DYFS staff as the Training Liaison to the Hub

✓ ***Services***

Assistance of Resource Family Advisory Board, FAFS, Universities, and Community groups

Major Strategies

- ◆ Coordinate training through a centralized “Training Hub.”
 - ◆ The role of the hub is to work with training consumers—resource families and staff at DYFS and contract agencies—to determine needed course.
 - ◆ The “Hub” then works with community-based organizations, who deliver the training.
-

T3: Recommendation 2

Rely on the expertise of those who know the system best—youth, resource parents, and birth parents—to improve the quality and “reality” of the training.

◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***

Short-term: Individual trainers are asked to incorporate more speakers

Long-term: Training Hub takes responsibility to plan for comprehensive program development and involvement of an available pool of panel members and co-trainers.

◆ ***Target Date to complete:***

July 1, 2003 for short-term

Long-term: After training hub is operational, 2005

◆ ***Resources needed:***

✓ ***Staffing***

Training professional for development, maintenance, training, and support for members of the panel/co-trainer pool.

✓ ***Services***

Stipends

Babysitting

Transportation

Major Strategies:

- ◆ As the topics of the training dictate, bring a youth and a birth parent to speak to the training class about their personal experiences at least once.
- ◆ Have a resource family member as a co-trainer.

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- ◆ Include other resource families who have served in various ways for various lengths of time, to present about their experiences.
- ◆ Birthparents who have been through the system are panel members during \ and provide expertise to prospective resource parents about realities of the system and service needs to help towards reunification.
- ◆ Children and teens who have been in care form a panel and present their experiences pertaining to family connections.
- ◆ Pay the resource parents, youth, and birth parents a realistic stipend for their time, provide child care and transportation if needed.
- ◆ Caseworkers and contract providers identify and recommend active and former birth families, youth, and resource parents who would be good on a training panel or in a co-trainer role.
- ◆ Trainers select, engage, and support panel members and co-trainers.

T3: Recommendation 3

Delivery of training will be welcoming: culturally competent, accessible, flexible, and based in adult-learning theories.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Central training staff spread new expectations
Individual trainers are responsible for their own classes.

- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
July 1, 2003

- ◆ ***Resources needed:***

- ✓ ***Services***
Funding for site costs, babysitting, transportation, etc.

Strategies:

- ◆ Host training session in convenient locations; choose family-friendly community settings (faith-based community, schools, firestations, YMCA, hospital, library) that are safe, near public transportation, and handicap accessible.
- ◆ Host training sessions more frequently, including nights and weekends.
- ◆ Special guests join the training, as the topics require. This includes those listed above as well as clinicians, experts, etc.
- ◆ Role-playing, practicing, videos and coaching are part of the training.
- ◆ Child care, refreshment, and transportation is available for attendees, as needed.
- ◆ The group includes a maximum of 15 families (no more than 25 people), to ensure trainers have time with all attendees.

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T4. Issue:

There is no assurance that all resource parents share a set of core competencies.

Findings about how things work now:

- ◆ Training is based on hours, not competencies.
- ◆ Training of resource parents is not tracked and monitoring is inconsistent.
- ◆ Training requirements are confusing.

Proposed Direction – from Best Practices

- ◆ New training curriculum will be competency based.
- ◆ Training will be centrally tracked and monitored—with information shared by all relevant entities/units/organizations.

T4: Recommendation 1

Ensure resource families maintain competencies, utilizing applied testing or qualitative assessments to demonstrate when competency is achieved.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Training “Hub” provider
- ◆ ***Target Date to complete:***
2005
- ◆ ***Resources needed:***
 - ✓ ***Staffing***
Cross-system team to develop and maintain the resource family tracking system
Additional data staff
 - ✓ ***Information Technology***
Funding for software development

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Have those developing the curriculum work with the Office of Information Services to develop appropriate, creative applied tests.
- ◆ Develop an integrated, web-based tracking and monitoring system for the management of resource families that monitors the attendance of courses and competencies levels reached.

T4: Recommendation 2

Any training either inside or contracted outside of DYFS will be monitored to ensure quality and consistency.

- ◆ ***Lead Responsibility:***
Training “Hub” provider

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- ◆ **Target Date to complete:**
2005

- ◆ **Resources needed:**

- ✓ **Staffing**

- Cross-system team to develop and maintain the resource family tracking system
 - Additional data staff

- ✓ **Information Technology**

- Funding for software development

Major Strategies (*describe specific/concrete activities-actions*)

- ◆ Survey participants at the conclusion of each training session, with feedback collected by managers over the trainer.
 - ◆ Analyze training enrollment and retention trends as a quality improvement measure.
 - ◆ Trainers are certified to deliver training and must re-certify every other year.
 - ◆ Trainers are reviewed on-site to check for competency.
 - ◆ Trainers are part of a team that convenes every other year to review curriculum and make changes to address up to date issues that surface from field practice. This team also includes resource parents, workers, subject matter experts, and those with national knowledge of best practices.
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Ideas in the Parking Lot

1. Create a “warmline” that resource families can call 24 hours a day for telephone support and/or resource referrals.
2. Create a specific procedure to ensure that resource families’ opinions are reflected in the case file and require that resource families’ feedback be obtained prior to court action.
3. Develop a plan and services to help children with their feelings of grief, loss and separation.
4. Improve practice around transition times and moving children. At a minimum, ensure that children always have time to say goodbye.
5. Find meaningful ways for DYFS to regularly say “thank you” to resource families, for example, hold an annual recognition luncheon.
6. Provide additional incentives to encourage individuals to become resource parents, such as college tuition reimbursement, mortgage assistance, weekend vacations, tickets to state events, etc.
7. Develop and integrate a data system so that placements are effectively tracked (those making placements always have correct information about what children are currently in a resource family’s home).
8. Work to increase the number of physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, dentists, etc. who will accept Medicaid in order to get the children and the resource parents the help they for the placement to succeed.

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9. Give each resource family a credit card they can use for specific purposes such as paying for respite, clothing allowance, etc.
10. Develop a resource family's "Bill of Rights."
11. Provide social workers with training to encourage sensitivity to linguistic, literacy, socioeconomic, and cultural difference.
12. Provide birth families with training and mentoring (especially regarding collaboration with resource parents) when the birth families are newly involved in the system.
13. Work with and train resource families to treat children placed in their home as "real" members of the family (equal treatment as biological children).
14. Make an effort to increase the number and availability of clinicians, training them to work specifically with child welfare issues.
15. Have some staff specially trained to help with educational issues who can assist resource parents as they work with schools and special education programs to meet children's needs.
16. Vacation funding is available to families to ensure they can bring all children living in their home along.
17. Make unannounced visits to resource family homes.
18. Develop model residential program for mothers and children together.
19. Transfer education funding for children in foster care to the Office of Education from the local in order to prevent disruptions in schools.
20. Create and develop a youth speaking group.
21. Re-establish pre-placement visits for the child and resource family/kin/relative"